

CHAPTER 7

GATHERING AND DISSEMINATING NAVY NEWS

To gather and disseminate news, you must first know what news is and how and whereto find it.

News is new information about anything. **It** is material previously unknown (or at least unpublished) that the public, in whole or in part, needs or wants to know. News also can be thought of as information that someone or some group, such as the Navy, wants the public to know.

A fundamental definition of news — a key part of newswriting — is basic to a journalist's understanding of the craft. Some think of news as a combination of the compass points: north, east, west and south. Although this is not strictly the beginning of the term, the idea does emphasize the broad dimension the field covers. News is everywhere.

The primary commodity of the mass media is news. This commodity is mass-produced by world events and is retailed in printed, pictured and spoken form to millions of customers. As a Navy journalist you are a middleman for this commodity. However, you handle only the portion known as Navy news.

In Chapter 2, you learned what news is and the ways in which it is presented to the public. In this chapter, you will learn the types of news sources and the methods used to obtain and distribute news.

TYPES OF NEWS SOURCES

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Identify the types of news sources used in producing and disseminating Navy news.

For an energetic and resourceful journalist, the avenues for finding news stories are limitless. In reality, however, you will find that your job in the Navy does not afford you the luxury of spending days, or even hours, tracking down elusive leads that may eventually result in one story.

As stated in Chapter 1, the Navy journalist is a public information specialist, and not a free press journalist. Your job is to tell the Navy story. That means you must write positive copy about your command and its people (save adverse news situations). You are

employed by the Navy. Therefore, you are expected to **work** for the Navy.

This is especially true regarding a ship or station newspaper to which you may be assigned. Such publications may be compared with the house organs of civilian businesses covered in Chapter 4. Their purpose is to inform, educate and entertain their readers and to provide a means of recognizing the achievements of the personnel in the organizations they represent. They are not intended as forums for exposes.

WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

When performing your job as Navy journalist, you will find that there are three primary sources of Navy news. They are as follows:

- Messages, directives and official correspondence
- Special contracts (both official and unofficial) maintained by the public affairs officer and his or her staff
- The future file

Information about practically every significant event that occurs in the Navy is passed on to those concerned via messages, directives or official correspondence. This includes news of coming events; current fleet exercises and operations; collisions at sea; search, rescue and salvage operations; plane crashes; acts of heroism; weather warnings and unusual weather conditions; changes of command; personnel promotions; new performance records; participation of Navy teams in athletics; upcoming charity drives and countless other occurrences.

Messages

Messages are transmitted between commands by rapid means, such as radio, teletype and flashing light. When a message arrives aboard ship or at a shore activity, a number of copies are made and distributed to various departments. The PAO normally gets copies of all message traffic that might be of interest in carrying out PAO duties.

Information contained in a message is usually brief and tersely written. The information is seldom detailed enough to be used for writing a comprehensive story. However, the basic facts are included and they provide a good starting point for you to develop a story.

Directives

Directives provide another source of Navy news for release to the civilian news media. You will find that much of the information they contain is intended for use by Navy personnel. Information about pay and allowances, uniform changes, advancements and promotions, service members' and dependents' benefits, training and educational programs, new regulations, morale, leadership, charity drives and similar subjects are put out in directive form. When analyzed and written in news story form to play up local interest or some other news peg, information of this type makes good copy for command newspapers and other publications written primarily for a Navy-oriented audience.

Official Correspondence

Official correspondence between commands often provides tips for worthwhile stories. An aviation machinist's mate first class, for example, submits an idea to the Naval Air Systems Command via the chain of command about an Improved method for servicing aircraft. The idea is tested and adopted, and the individual is commended for the initiative and ingenuity shown. The entire transaction takes place on paper in the form of official correspondence. If copies of the letters are routed to the PAO for information, you will have an opportunity to develop a good story for internal and external release if the facts are unclassified

Security is an important factor for you to consider before using any information available in naval messages, directives and official correspondence for a news release. If the material is classified, you must not use it.

SPECIAL CONTACTS

Every public affairs office depends on tips from outside sources to develop stories. Regardless of the size of a command, it is impossible for you to know everything that is going on. By creating a list of special contacts, both officials and personal friends, and acquainting them with your job, you will assure yourself of having a steady flow of news items. Although a stranger may be reluctant to telephone your office and

suggest a story, a friend or an acquaintance will feel free to call.

Officially, you should at least know the name, rank and title of every senior officer in your command. You should also have a good idea of the type of work they do and where they can be reached when you need information. If you remain in your job long enough, you will probably have personal contact with them. If you show them you are an efficient and capable person and establish credibility, they will be good sources of news as well.

You will find that your job is easier when Cmdr. Tilde, the medical officer, calls to tell you about a new medical device being tested at the clinic; or when PNC Umlaut informs you that the Navy's oldest enlisted man has reported aboard; or when Mr. Caret at MWR lets you know that a base civilian signed a minor league contract to play in the New York Mets organization; or when Lt. Breve announces to you that he is engaged to marry a former Miss America.

Eventually, all of these stories might have faltered down to the PAO, but the fact that you were informed firsthand gives you ahead start on getting the story out while it is still news.

FUTURE FILE

Most public affairs offices should maintain a current listing of all events that have been scheduled or planned for the future. Material collected in the **future file** usually falls under the heading of **created news**. The public affairs office develops the ideas, plans and writes the stories and releases them to achieve maximum dissemination.

The public visitation of your command, for example, is scheduled months in advance. To make sure the visitation is a success, the PAO embarks on a planned publicity program. Prominent public figures are invited as guest speakers. Displays and exhibits are set up. Parades, reviews and drill team demonstrations are planned. An air show, ranging from a simple, low-level flyover to unique maneuvers of the famed Blue Angels, may be scheduled. A steady flow of releases about the program plans is sent to news media to attract attention and visitors. Another event similar to public visitation is a planned, detailed program about the construction of a new ship, especially anew type of ship. A public affairs program is generated for the keel laying, building, christening, launching, fitting out, commissioning, sea trials, assignment to fleet and force commanders, and finally, the shakedown cruise.

However, not all material developed by the PAO takes place on such a large scale. A visit by an important dignitary, a CO's speech, the return of a ship from extended operations, special anniversaries, observances of national holidays in conjunction with the civilian community and athletic and entertainment events that will benefit charities are all created news items included in the future file. The PAO gives these events advance buildups, spot news coverage, and occasionally, follow-up coverage.

The future file is usually a collection of file folders, each one containing advance information about a particular upcoming event. It can also be as simple as a calendar pad with enough space in its blocks to write key words that serve as reminders. A wall-sized grid under plexiglass works well too.

Another variation of the future file is the date-box. This consists of 31 file folders containing advance material for each day of the month.

Whatever arrangement is used, all public affairs offices should maintain a good tickler system of upcoming events to assure complete coverage of all news events.

METHODS OF GATHERING NEWS

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Recognize the most commonly used methods of gathering Navy news.

The four most commonly used methods in news gathering used by Navy journalists are observation, telephone conversations, research and interviews.

OBSERVATION

Observation consists of your actually seeing an event take place and then reporting what you have seen in the form of a news story. The difference between a good story and a poor one is often in the skill of the observer. Skilled observers use their eyes, ears, mind, notebooks and tape recorders. They make sure they get the concrete facts, specific figures and accurate information. They look for the colorful, the dramatic or the unusual in any situation.

Skilled observers always try to get more information than they actually need. They know it is easier to discard excess material than to retrace their steps after the story is cold. Developing your powers of observation can come only through experience. You cannot become a skilled observer by simply reading a

book. The key to becoming a good observer is to look for more than you see on the surface.

TELEPHONE CONVERSATIONS

The telephone plays an important role in your daily work as a journalist. It saves you time, legwork and it often enables you to reach people who are ordinarily too busy to see you in person.

Telephone conversations may range from full-scale interviews to brief queries to verify or amplify information. But regardless of how often you use this method of news gathering, you should keep the following points in mind:

- Know what information you want before you dial. Keep your pencil and paper handy. Do not call someone and then ask that person to wait while you look for writing materials.
- Speak politely indistinct, well-modulated tones.
- Be cheerful and businesslike.
- Make sure you get your facts straight. Ask the other person to repeat figures or spell out names.
- Avoid three-way conversations among yourself, the person on the telephone and somebody else in your office.
- Recheck your information by reading it back to the person who has given it to you.
- Record the conversation using a "telephone pick-up" (a device that attaches to the telephone receiver and plugs into the microphone jack of the cassette tap recorder). Be sure to inform the person on the other end that you are recording the conversation for note-taking purposes only.
- **Do not** discuss classified information.

Although a telephone is a very useful instrument, remember it is not the only, and not necessarily the best, method of gathering news. It should supplement, but not replace, all other methods. Whenever it is proper and convenient, use the telephone, but do not be afraid to engage in a little legwork

RESEARCH

Research is nothing more than digging out information from files and reference works. Research is used to verify or amplify facts in news stories and to give depth to feature stories and magazine articles. Very few

Navy public affairs offices have adequate reference libraries. To do any extensive research, learn to use the facilities of the nearest Navy, public or college library. Here you can find the necessary books, encyclopedias, almanacs, magazines, atlases, directories, indexes and similar references. The Naval Historical Center (OP-09BH), Washington, D.C., is a good source of additional information about the Navy.

INTERVIEWS

About 90 percent of everything in a news story is based on some form of interviewing — either in person, by telephone, or occasionally, by correspondence.

As a Navy journalist in search of information, you must learn who to get information from and how to record facts. You must learn techniques for handling different kinds of people — how to draw some out, how to keep others on the topic and how to evaluate the motives or honesty of others. In short, you must learn how to get along with people and how to treat them with tact and understanding while still accomplishing your purpose.

Types of Interviews

A distinction must be made between news stories that are merely based on interviews and actual interview stories. Very seldom is a journalist present at the scene of an accident as it takes place — for example, at a collision between two automobiles. A story of this type must be based entirely on interviews — either in person or by telephone — with the police, with eyewitnesses, with the victims themselves, and depending upon the gravity of the accident, with the garage mechanics, hospital attendants, relatives of the victims and others.

In news stories of this kind, the journalist is concerned with a news event that requires interviewing people to learn the facts. The **interview story**, on the other hand, is essentially a feature built around the views, personality or exploits of an individual or group of individuals. The difference, in most cases, is largely in the emphasis. In writing the **interview-based news story**, you stress the news, whereas in the **interview story**, you place the stress on the person being interviewed.

Interviews are as varied as the people who grant them, the journalists who conduct them and the news that suggests them. Rarely are interviews so mechanical that they can be reduced to standard formulas or categories. Several types, however, deserve special

attention because they are the ones that occur most frequently. They are as follows:

- News interview
- Telephone interview
- Casual interview
- Personality interview
- Symposium interview
- News conference
- Prepared question interview

NEWS INTERVIEW.— The news interview is based on “hard news,” some event or development of current and immediate interest. Suppose you are a journalist assigned to the staff of Commander, Naval Air Force, U.S. Atlantic Fleet (COMNAVAIRLANT), and a new supercarrier has been launched for the Navy. Later, you learn the earner will be assigned to the Atlantic Fleet, and you are assigned to write the story. The original news announcement released by the shipyard or naval authorities would most likely contain only the broad, straight facts — cost, size and construction details.

A story of this scope is of major interest to the local community of the supercarrier’s home port. Media want more information than is offered in the initial report. By interviewing competent news sources, such as key officers on COMNAVAIRLANT’s staff, and asking well-defined, carefully considered questions, you can localize, illuminate, expand and add depth to the original story. When will the ship be commissioned? How will the ship’s presence affect the local economy? What will its mission be? When is it expected to join the fleet? To which carrier division will it be assigned? Will there be a flag officer embarked? Has a prospective CO been selected? How will this new carrier strengthen our national defense effort?

In any interview, try to speak to the best authority available. Do not settle for the supply clerk if the information you need should come from the CO.

TELEPHONE INTERVIEW.— The telephone interview, a modified version of the news interview, has a number of obvious advantages, and at the same time, it has several limitations that challenge a resourceful journalist. Ingenuity and clear thinking are sometimes needed to locate a news source when a big story breaks; the power of persuasion is often necessary to elicit information from a reluctant person who can easily hang up the receiver, and a sympathetic telephone voice is

important when you are talking to a family where tragedy has struck

CASUAL INTERVIEW.— An accidental encounter between a journalist and a news source on the street or at a social gathering can often result in a tip that arouses the curiosity of a writer. A major news story may be the result after you do some digging.

PERSONALITY INTERVIEW.— In the personality interview an effort is made to let the reader see the appearance, mannerisms, background and even the character of the subject. Magazines like the *New Yorker* have developed this type of interview, called “a profile,” into a high art not easily attained by daily newspapers under the pressure of deadlines. However, with preliminary research on an interviewee’s background, intelligent planning of questions and skillful interviewing, a good journalist can let a person’s words and mannerisms bring that individual vividly to life in an interesting newspaper feature story.

SYMPOSIUM INTERVIEW.— From time to time, news developments of current interest require a journalist or a team of journalists to seek information not from one or two sources but from a dozen, or perhaps a hundred or more. For example, which of the two presidential candidates in the television debate made the best impression on the public? How do the residents of a city feel about their football team winning the Super Bowl? For some stories — as in a pre-election poll — all of the techniques of a scientific opinion sampling may be required. In other instances, reactions and comments may result in a lively feature story. Depending on the subject, the symposium (or group) interview may bring out opinions of importance, entertainment or merely the views of the “man on the street” on some subject of general interest.

NEWS CONFERENCE.— In recent years, an increasingly popular phenomenon of journalism has developed — the news conference. By presenting news conferences “live” on television, President Kennedy raised them to one of the most potent forces in the public exchange of opinion between the people and their government. For close to 70 years, in a different format, the news conference has been an important source of news. The person interviewed at a news conference may be the President of the United States, the Chief of Naval Operations, a senior government official, the manager of a big league team, a movie star plugging a new motion picture or any other person promoting what is believed to be a news story of interest to the public. As in every interview story, preliminary groundwork pays off; a knowledge of the interviewee’s background is

indispensable. During the interview, an alertness to story possibilities often leads to unexpected results.

Additional details on news conferences are covered later in this chapter.

PREPARED QUESTION INTERVIEW.— When direct person-to-person questioning cannot be arranged with an important news source, journalists occasionally resort to giving that source a set of prepared questions to which a reply is requested. More often than not, however, the questions go unheeded. When the journalist does get a reply, a major news story generally results.

In every interview assignment, the journalist’s objective is always the same — to ferret out as much news, details, significance and color about a personality or event as possible. The success of the story depends on the quantity and quality of the information gleaned from the interview and the journalist’s sense of news values and writing ability.

Interview Tips

The manner in which you prepare for conducting interviews can often determine the successful future of those projects. What follows are 10 tips on handling interview assignments that should prove useful to you.

1. Know what you want. Whether you are interviewing someone for a hard news story or you are on an assignment for a feature, remember you are the one who will have to write the story. This means that you must bear in mind the essence of the story you are after or the angle you want to develop. If you are covering a fire, what are the things you should find out? They will include whether anyone was hurt, the extent of the damage, the cause of the fire, how it was discovered, which fire stations responded, how long it took to put out the blaze and many other facts.

The same kind of analysis must be applied to all stories. This will guide you in your questioning, and most important, in your search for details. Learn how to dig for facts. Be alert, interested and curious. Details are more vivid than generalities. For example, if your subject casually mentions he was the editor of a college newspaper, find out the name of the college and when the position was held. These are simple, natural questions that will come to the minds of some of your readers; do not leave them unsatisfied. Every story is unique. It will differ from others in many details. Unless you know what to look for and how to get it through proper questioning, your story will be incomplete.

2. Prepare for the interview. Whenever possible, particularly on a feature assignment, lookup your subject's background. From news clippings or from reference works like *Who's Who*, try to determine beforehand any views the individual may have on the topic of your interview. Ignorance of an important person's biography and work may seem insulting to the individual concerned, and you may lose the person's cooperation. However, you should never try to impress the interviewee with your knowledge of the individual's own subject.

3. Plan your questions. This does not mean you should read them formally or present them in an artificial manner. Conduct your conversation in a natural, informal fashion. Always keep your questions in mind and try to guide the conversation along lines that will give you a story with substance. Planned questions, jotted down on a pad in front of you, are particularly valuable when you interview someone by using the telephone. At the same time, be receptive to a new angle that may arise and may be better than the one you had originally planned.

4. Be careful about taking notes. Some interviewers write everything; others write hardly a word. Some subjects become uncomfortable in the presence of a reporter transcribing every word they say and at the prospect of having their names appear in the paper. Other interviewees prefer to have their words written down to avoid being misquoted. In general, you will probably remember most of the conversation if you write the story while it is still fresh in your mind. Details, such as names, dates, statistics, key words and distinctive phrases, should, of course, be jotted down on the spot.

If you have access to a small, portable tape recorder, by all means use it. Some subjects may be uncomfortable in the presence of a tape recorder, but most will not. Try to use a tape recorder with a built-in microphone. This will avoid the sometimes awkward practice of holding a hand microphone to the interviewee's face.

5. Know your subject. Some people need to be flattered; others cajoled. Some are naturally shy; others will talk a blue streak. Evaluate your interviewee and guide yourself accordingly. The majority of people will react favorably to a straightforward, factual approach and will not be impressed by arrogance or excessive humility. Only courtesy, intelligent curiosity, a sincere desire to be natural and a knowledge of what you are after will help you come away from an interview with a newsworthy story.

These are major principles that can be applied in nearly all interviews. However, as previously mentioned, alert and resourceful journalists must be ready to vary their techniques depending on the temperament and views of the interviewee, the nature of the story and the dictates of circumstances.

6. Be specific. A question like "Anything new?" will, in most cases, bring forth very little information because the average layman knows little about what is of news value. Ask direct and leading questions.

7. Be accurate. The smallest error can cause embarrassment and even a libel suit. Do not be afraid to ask questions and to check facts. When you interview someone by using the telephone, one letter can easily be mistaken for another. Therefore, spell out names by using phonetic aids. Spell it: "S-M-I-T-H. S as in SIERRA, M as in MIKE. . . ." (Of course, make sure it is "Smith" and not "Smythe.") People dislike having their names misspelled. Also, obtain the complete and correct addresses of people in a story.

8. Look for color. In personality features, particularly, an apt word or phrase describing your subject's appearance or mannerisms will help your readers "see" the person. Here is a helpful suggestion: As you conduct the interview, try to think of words that would best describe your subject in a nutshell. In some stories, a reference to a person's movements, gestures, way of talking and his or her surroundings may give a better picture of that individual. Often, you will be able to make some comparison in terms of a figure or object familiar to your readers, but be careful not to offend the interviewee.

9. Do not talk too much. You are interviewing someone to get information, not to demonstrate how smart you are. At the start, you may need to lead the conversation along general lines to put the interviewee at ease and to get around to your subject. But after that, be self-effacing. On occasion, you may have to play dumb; then assume nothing and ask everything. Be conscious of time; do not waste yours or the interviewee's. Occasionally, a time limit is imposed on an interview. When time is limited, you will have to arrange your questions in order of importance. Although the relationship between you and your subject should be informal, remember that the nature of your call is business, not social.

10. Remember your sense of humor. This may break the initial ice or even save your interview if the interviewee has a negative attitude.

One final thought — the best kind of interview is one that proceeds in a friendly, natural, informal way. There was a time when some news people thought little of using deception or impersonation to get the information they wanted. Respectable newspapers and other media frown on these practices today.

Additional information on interviews maybe found in Chapter 15 (Radio and Television Interviewing).

AUTHORITY FOR RELEASING NAVY NEWS

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Identify the proper authority for the release of Navy news.

When information previously limited to a controlled number of persons is made available to the general public, it is said to be “released.” If this is done in formal written form, the document itself is termed a **release**, or a **news release**. Officers in command of all ships and stations, as well as senior commands, are authorized to release certain types of news without requesting advance approval from higher authority.

News of purely local interest is the first of this type. However, there are certain cautions. All officers in command are responsible for keeping CHINFO and other concerned seniors informed of all events and actions when any possibility exists that the national news media may become interested. There are also special procedures for handling news releases relating to members of Congress and civic officials.

Spot news, including announcements or answers to queries of an emergency nature, where delay in issuing information would be harmful to the best interests of the Navy, is releasable without advanced approval of higher authority.

Categories of news releases for which local release is not authorized, without prior approval of higher authority, are covered in detail in *PA Regs*. A partial list of these categories is included in figure 7-1.

In some cases the PAO is authorized by the officer in command to release certain news items, such as “hometowners” and news of a purely routine nature.

Release of information by any command is carried out by, or with, the assistance of the command PAO. Offices or divisions within a command cannot release information to the public without consulting the PAO.

For a complete study on the proper release of information through channels from the heads of

A. Accidents and Casualties

1. Civilians on board Navy ships, etc.
2. Foreign nationals in training with the Navy
3. Involving more than one service
4. Nuclear
5. Names and photographs of casualties

B. Biological Research, Chemical Warfare and Psychological Warfare Programs

C. Classified Information and Intelligence Activities

D. Foreign National and Foreign Countries

1. Policy
2. U.S. foreign defense plans
3. Operations and training exercises

E. Movements of Units

1. Between ports in the U.S.
2. Overseas areas

F. New Weapons and Equipment

1. Performance or capabilities
2. Modifications resulting in improvement

G. Nuclear

1. Nuclear propulsion
2. Nuclear weapons capability of U.S. forces
3. Port visits of nuclear-powered ships
4. SSB(N) operations

H. Personnel

1. Movements of
2. Name and address lists (example: “FOUO” directories)
3. Reduction in personnel
4. Statistics

I. Scientific Results (unclassified)

J. Submarine Sightings

K. Supply

1. Sources/quantities of strategic or critical supplies.
2. Movements, assembly and storage of supplies/ materials

L. Technical Information

M. Training of Specialized Units

Figure 7-1.—Subjects not releasable locally (unless approved by higher authority).

government down to individual units, refer to the most current version of *PA Regs.* It describes the procedures for releasing news at all levels of interest — local, regional, national and international.

METHODS OF DISSEMINATING NAVY NEWS

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Determine the methods of disseminating Navy news.

Navy news material, properly authorized for release, can be channeled to the media in several ways. The nine commonly used methods are as follows:

- Standard Navy news release
- News advisory
- Spot news announcements
- News conferences
- Interviews
- Background briefings
- Feature releases
- Advance releases
- Personal appearances

STANDARD NAVY NEWS RELEASE

A Navy news release is an official Navy statement prepared in news story form. The enlisted journalist normally prepares and edits it, then the PAO, through the authority of the officer in command, approves the release. As a Navy journalist, you will work with the Navy news release more than with any other method of news dissemination. A well-prepared and edited standard Navy news release — placed in the hands of all interested media at the same time, supplying all with identical information — remains the most satisfactory method of releasing news.

Most public affairs offices, particularly at larger commands, use a printed heading for their news releases. These are attractive and help members of the media identify the source of the release more quickly. However, they are by no means necessary. If a printed heading is used, keep it simple, informal, suitable and in good taste to cover all types of releases. The news value of the material, and not the packaging, is the most important consideration. A sample release format is shown in figures 7-2 and 7-3.

Certain information, however, should always be included in the heading of a release. Make sure your release format includes the following items:

- Name, address and ZIP code of the originating command
- Office telephone numbers (including facsimile number)
- Point(s) of contact for further information
- Type of release
- Release number
- Short headline to identify the content of the release
- Date of release

News releases should be double-spaced, typed on only one side of a sheet of paper and legibly reproduced. Official directives regarding economy in duplication on both sides of the paper do not apply to news releases.

Timing of Navy News Releases

The timing of news releases is almost as important as their content. An improperly timed handout maybe lost in the media editor's in-box simply because it is poorly timed.

Most Navy stories are distributed **For Immediate Release**. This authorizes the media to use the story as soon as it is received.

Occasionally, however, it is necessary to distribute a story on a **Hold For Release** basis. This tag, along with the authorized date of release, is attached to important feature stories. It is usually typed in the spot where **For Immediate Release** appears in the figure 7-2.

Assume that the CNO accepts a speaking engagement in your city. If an advance copy of the speech is available, it may be released to news media on a **Hold For Release** basis. This would give news media several advantages. First, reporters covering the event would not have to take notes of the speech. They would merely check their future release to make sure the CNO followed the text. Second, television or radio people may not want to record the entire speech. With an advance copy of it in their possession, they could tape only key portions. Third, if the speech is important enough, newspaper editors may decide to publish it verbatim. The advance copy would permit them to set the speech in type beforehand so the speech could be printed immediately after it was delivered.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT

**LT HACHEK PRAWN (PAO)
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OFFICIAL NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**RELEASE #12-94
FEBRUARY 2,1994**

SHORT HEADLINE HELPS EDITORS IDENTIFY STORY'S NEWS PEG

WITH THE FIRST FLEET, February 2 — This is the recommended first-page format for Navy news releases. It is for immediate release under a dateline. The “heading” contains the office of origin and its mailing address, telephone numbers, fax number, point(s) of contact for further information, type of release, release number, headline and date.

Other recommended styles of datelines are as follows:

1. For releases originating ashore:

SAN DIEGO, Calif., Feb. 2

2. For releases originating at sea:

ABOARD THE USS CONTOUR INTEGRAL AT SEA, Feb. 2

If there is more than one page of copy in a Navy news release, end each page, except the last, with the word “more.”

-more-

Figure 7-2.—Sample Navy news release format (page 1 of 2).

**NS WEIERSTRASS PAO
NAVY NEWS RELEASE FORMAT
2-2-2-2-2**

Second and subsequent pages of the release should be “slugged” for identity and numbered as shown above.

Do not hyphenate words between lines, and do not break sentences or paragraphs between pages. Paragraphs are indented five spaces. Begin your first paragraph about one-third to one-half of the way down the first page.

The copy itself should be neatly typewritten, double spaced in lines 60-75 characters in length with one-inch or better margins all around. This allows the editor to editor make notes on the release.

Use a high-speed copier when several copies of a release are necessary. Make sure each copy is legible. When a number of pages are involved, check to see that the pages are in order and that there are no blanks.

Remember, do not clutter an editor’s desk with a news release unless you are telling him something newsworthy.

Finish your story on the last page with either “-30-” “-end-” or “-USN-” to indicate the end.

-USN-

Figure 7-3.—Sample Navy news release format (page 2 of 2).

In general, however, news media prefer to use news as soon as it is received. Reporters take pride in bringing facts to light, not in withholding them. Never give them a story marked **Hold For Release** unless you have a good reason.

News Release Numbering System

For quick reference and orderly filing, a release number is assigned to all outgoing stories. There are various systems of assigning release numbers. Most commands follow the practice of beginning a new series at the beginning of each year. The first release sent out in 1994, for example, would have a release number of 1-94. The second release would be 2-94, and so forth. All releases are numbered consecutively in this manner until the end of the year. Remember that release numbers are assigned to each story, not to each copy of a story. If one release is sent to 17 different media, all 17 copies should bear the same release number.

NEWS ADVISORY

A news advisory is an abbreviated form of a news release intended to get the news media to cover an event themselves. The news advisory is normally no more than a page in length and includes a compact description of the event. Pertinent information, such as the date, time, location, specific details and the significance of the event, also should be included. You may disseminate the news advisory in the same manner as a news release, using the format in figure 7-2.

SPOT NEWS ANNOUNCEMENTS

When an event of immediate and urgent news interest occurs within the command, such as an unscheduled VIP visit or an accident involving casualties, all available and properly releasable facts are issued promptly and without waiting until a complete account is compiled. Spot news of this type is usually released by bulletin or in memorandum form. However, if circumstances require, it may be read over the telephone. Spot news is always issued **For Immediate Release**.

NEWS CONFERENCES

Whenever a news event is of great importance to the local public or when there is a visit by a prominent official who wishes to address the media, a command calls a news conference and sends invitations to all interested media. Information is released at a news

conference through a senior naval officer or other Navy spokesperson, an individual involved in unclassified activity of public interest, an expert in some newsworthy project, survivors of an accident or perhaps someone directly involved in some activity or event.

Often, after an advance release goes out announcing the intended visit of a VIP or some other event of significance, the media requests a news conference.

When time permits, prepare media information kits (covered in Chapter 16) to supplement information made public at news conferences.

Avoid, if possible, requesting media to submit questions in advance. When advance questions are desirable, as in cases where highly technical answers would be required for some questions, correspondents should be advised of this. When written questions are volunteered, detailed answers are normally prepared and distributed to all attending media representatives immediately preceding the conference.

A news conference can be abused. The only reason to call a news conference is to release information that cannot be covered adequately by a news release. A news conference should not be used solely as a prestige vehicle. It should be called only when there is something to say. Most media cannot spare the time and personnel for this type of coverage. The quickest way to alienate reporters is to make them cover an event in person when they could have covered it over the telephone.

A news conference can do a lot for the Navy when it is used properly. News conferences establish public esteem, erase controversy and show that the Navy has nothing to hide. Reporters are given the opportunity to ask questions and get all the information they want. This often results in clearing up misunderstandings. Finally, it enables all media to get the same information at the same time.

INTERVIEW

An interview differs from a news conference in that it is usually initiated by a media representative and involves communication of information from a responsible spokesperson to only one reporter.

BACKGROUND BRIEFINGS

Background briefings differ from a routine news conference or interview only in their usual provisions that a precise source is not identified in the reporters' stories. The content or source of a story written from a briefing is usually attributed to a "Navy spokesperson,"

“informed military sources” or some other truthful, but not specifically identified, individual imparting the information. In such cases, the ground rules are clearly understood and agreed to by all participants. In most cases, especially when the subject is not of a technical nature, these briefings are conducted by the command PAO.

FEATURE RELEASES

Features, or “time releases,” differ from spot news mainly in the degree of immediacy. That is, it makes little difference whether particular news accounts are passed along to the general public today, tomorrow or next week.

A feature may concern previously undisclosed developments dating well into the past or some upcoming event or anniversary. Either way, it must contain a high degree of general human interest. This type of release is usually made in writing, but it may be given out through an interview or news conference. Often a feature release lends itself to pictorial treatment by the use of still photographs or videotape. Feature releases are issued for both immediate and future use.

ADVANCE RELEASES

You read about advance releases (stories) in Chapter 5. Advance releases are issued concerning events scheduled or anticipated for the future. They are generally on a **Hold For Release** basis, specifying exact times, to make sure of simultaneous use by all interested media and to prevent premature disclosure. An advance release often is accompanied by an invitation to media representatives to attend an event and is usually supplemented by follow-up releases. Official photographs, printed programs or other material providing in-depth background on a forthcoming event are often enclosed with an advance release.

PERSONAL APPEARANCES

Personal appearances include formal speeches and informal remarks by Navy officials and authorized spokespersons in which information is released to appear as an official news announcement. The information could be given at public or semipublic meetings, in public forums, on radio and television programs or during any other contact with the public. The size of the group being addressed is irrelevant, and it does not matter whether the remarks are or are not reported by the news media.

